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ABSTRACT

During the past 15 years, a variety of studies conducted mostly in the industrial North and Far West, have sought to determine the attitudes and feelings of various populations toward homosexual men, lesbians, and homosexuality. These studies often reported the relationships between attitudes and personality traits or demographic variables. During this same time period articles have appeared in professional counseling journals advising practitioners of their professional responsibility to address the special needs and problems of homosexual clients, particularly students. This study examined the attitudes, experiences, and feelings of school counselors in the state of South Carolina about homsexual students. All 483 counselors (grades 5-12) in the state were surveyed. Responses were received from 142 counselors for a return rate of 29 percent. Instruments used were the Counselors' Perceptions of the Quality of School Life for Gays and Lesbians Survey (a measure designed specifically for this study), the Modified Attitudes Toward Homosexuality survey (MATH), and the Index of Homophobia measure (IH). Significant differences were found between counselors' attitudes and feelings about homosexuality vis-a-vis their educational level, gender, and race. Counselors often expressed ambivalent attitudes toward homosexuality though few harbored neutral feelings. Most counselors felt ill-prepared to work with homosexual students. Data are displayed in 13 tables, including the mean and standard deviations for each item on the MATH and IH surveys. (ABL)

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# Attitudes, Experiences, and Feelings of Guidance Counselors In Working with Homosexual Students:

## A Report on the Quality of School Life for Southern Gay and Lesbian Students

Paper presented at the

American Educational Research Association Meeting
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New Orleans, LA

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Support for this study was provided by the Gay and Lesbian Advocacy Research Project, Inc., the South Carolina School Counselors Association, and the College of Education at the University of South Carolina.

ABSTRACT

The author examines the attitudes, experiences, and feelings of school counselors about homosexual students. Data were collected from 142 South Carolina school counselors (grades 5-12) using the Counselors' Perceptions of the Quality of School Life for Gays and Lesbians Survey, the Modified Attitudes Toward Homosexuality survey, and the Index of Homophobibia measure.

It was found that a) significant differences exist between counselors' attitudes and/or feelings about homosexuality vis-a-vis their educational level, gender, and race; b) these variables account for less than 10% of these scores' variance; c) several items on each of scale accounted for the majority of this variance; d) compared with Southern teachers, guidance counselors express more negative attitudes and feelings about homosexuality; e) compared to high school students or college students preparing to teach, this sample of guidance counselors express less negative attitudes and feelings about ho osexuality; f) most guidance counselors have known homosexual students in their schools, however relatively few have worked with this special population; g) counselors who have worked with gay youth report these students experiencing greater problems than their peers; h) most counselors believe that sexual concerns of students are legitimate topics for discussion and that the counselor's role is to help these students clarify their feelings; i) counselors professional experience is an important factor in their willingness to work in a supportive manner with gay students; j) while many counselors harbor negative feelings and attitudes about homosexuality, a majority are willing to assume a non-judgmental, professional relationship with homosexual students; k) counselors who have had prior personal contact with a homosexual student are more likely to express a willingness to attend workshops or to seek training in intervention techniques for gay and lesbian youth.

Specific recommendations for counselor education and counseling practice are discussed.

# INTRODUCTION

During the past 15 years, a variety of studies have sought to determine the attitudes and feelings of various populations toward gay men, lesbians and homosexuality. With only a few exceptions (FN1), these studies were conducted in metropolitan areas of the industrial North and far West. Moreover, as Hudson and Ricketts (1980) have observed, most studies have assessed persons' attitudes toward homosexuality rather than their reactions to homosexual persons. These studies often report the relationships between attitudes and personality traits or demographic variables (FN2).

Though such studies are not without conflicting data, Gregory Herek (1984) has summarized the consistent patterns observable across these and other groups. Persons with negative attitudes report less personal contact with gays and lesbians, fewer (if any) homosexual behavior, a more conservative religious ideology and more traditional attitudes about sex roles than those with less negative views. Persons harboring negative attitudes toward homosexuality are also more likely to have resided in the mid-west or Southern region of this country, to have grown up in rural areas or in small towns, and to be male, older, and less well-educated than those expressing more positive attitudes.

During this same time period, articles have appeared in professional counseling journals advising practitioners of their professional responsibility to address the special needs and problems of homosexual clients, particularly students (FN3). Prior to this study, however, no researcher has reported the beliefs, feelings of guidance counselors toward homosexuality and their experiences in working with lesbian and gay adolescents.

Instruments

Data reported in this paper were collected as part of a larger study of the quality of school life for Southern gay and lesbian students. Among the most salient findings gleaned from that research are: 1) Most gay and lesbian youth have internalized negative attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality; 2) The lack of knowledge about homosexuality and the absence of perceived support from school counselors contribute to the difficulty homosexual students have in acknowledging and effectively dealing with their sexual orientation; 3) Gay and lesbian students adopt a variety of coping strategies as they deal with the meaning of being different and being gay in the South; and, 4) In conjunction with the adoption of these coping strategies several psychological, in-school and out-of-school symptoms are displayed (Sears, 1988a; Sears, in press).

This paper addresses eight specific questions: What are the attitudes and feelings of middle and high school guidance counselors toward homosexuality? How do these compare with students and teachers? How do responses to these questions vary according to the demographic and professional factors? What contact have school counselors had with homosexual students? What are counselors' views of their professional role in working with this sexual minority? To what degree do they perceive gay and lesbian students confronting unique difficulties in the school setting? How prepared do these counselors view themselves and their fellow professionals in meeting the needs of this special population? What relationships exist between counselors' prior participation in programs and workshops about homosexuality and their attitudes/feelings about homosexuality as well as the professional role that they assume in working with these students?

## METHOD

### Sample

483 questionnaires were distributed to every school counselor (grades 5-12) in the state of South Carolina during the spring of 1987. One hundred and forty-two (29%) of these were returned. Seventy-nine percent of the counselors were female and 76 percent were white. In terms of clients for whom they work, 20% counseled fifth and sixth grade students; 28%, seventh and eighth grade students; and 70%, ninth through twelfth grade students. Most (68 percent) had earned a master's degree, and one-quarter had received a specialist or doctorate degree. Twenty-nine percent of the sample had worked as counselors for less than five years; 35 percent between five and ten years, 29 percent for more than ten but less than 20 years, and 8 percent for 20 years or more. The average respondent devoted about one-quarter of her work time to administrative responsibilities, one-fifth of her time to personal counseling with students, 17 percent of her time to academic counseling, and about one-tenth of her time to testing or career counseling. Three-fourths of the sample are native South Carolinians (less than 15 percent grew up outside of the South), and a plurality (39 percent) work in rural schools, one-quarter in urban schools, and 36 percent in suburban schools. The typical respondent was a white, native South Carolinian female in her late thirties (19 percent were over 50 years of age and 12 percent were under 31) with a master's degree and ten years counseling experience with rural adolescents. Demographically, this sample corresponds to the universe from which it was drawn. However, given the questionnaire return rate, this sample is presumed to be more knowledgeable about and supportive of homosexuality than the typical school counselor in the state.

The Counselors' Perceptions of the Quality of School Life for Gays and Lesbians (CPQSLGL), was developed specifically for this study. This survey was composed of five parts: demographics, school climate, professional relationships with gay clientele, counseling philosophy and duties, and anticipated professional activities. Validity of the instrument was established through a careful review by six experts in the counseling field with experience working with gay youth. Internal reliability of the questionnaire was assessed by inclusion of several items requesting similar information.

Additionally, two standardized instruments were used in this study. The Modified Attitudes Toward Homosexuality survey (MATH) is 30 item instrument that uses a nine point Likert-type format with the range of scores from 30 to 270 (strongly disagree 1 to strongly agree 9). The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient is +.95. Criterion validity has been judged satisfactory (Price, 1982). This instrument is a derivation of an earlier one, "Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Scale" (MacDonald, et al., 1973; Sobel, 1976). The response categories was reduced in this study to a five point Likert-type format with the range of scores from 30 to 150 (strongly disagree 1 to strongly agree 5).

The Index of Homophobia (IH) is a measure of a person's reactions toward homosexual encounters. This 25 item summated category partition scale has a score range from 0 to 100. The alpha reliability coefficient is .90. There is good construct validity and a very high content validity (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980).

Procedure

Through the assistance of the South Carolina School Counselors Association (SCSCA), questionnaires were distributed at two state-wide conferences. These questionnaires were also mailed to every school

counselor working with adolescents in the state. A letter of endorsement from the executive committee and the president of the SCSCA accompanied the questionnaire. A reminder to complete and return it was placed in the organization's spring newsletter. Since anonymity was promised, no further attempts to follow-up non-respondents were possible.

## FINDINGS

I. Attitudes and feelings of school guidance counselors toward homosexuality.

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INSERT TABLES 1 & 2 HERE

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Indicated in tables 1 and 2 are the means and standard deviations for each item on the Modified Attitudes Toward Homosexuality survey (MATH) and the Index of Homophobia (IH). One of the most illuminating findings is that counselors are more likely to express positive attitudes toward homosexuality than they are to harbor positive feelings about homosexuals. About one-third of the attitudinal statements reflect positive support for homosexuals and an understanding of homosexuality ($\bar{X} < 2.4$ or $> 3.6$); only two of the 30 items (numbers 3 and 5, table 1) drew negative responses. However, few counselors expressed positive feelings toward homosexuals or indicated positive reactions to situations wherein they personally confront homosexuality. Only one of the 25 items (number 18, table 2) elicited a positive response; nearly one-half (11) of these items elicited a negative reactions.

The positive attitudes evidenced among these school guidance counselors centered around civil rights issues (e.g., homosexuals holding

TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations for
Individual Items Composing the
Modified Attitudes Toward
Homosexuality Scale

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

| Item | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Homosexuals should not be permitted to raise children. | 2.75 | 1.11 |
| 2. Homosexuals should not be allowed to hold important positions. | 2.06 | 1.11 |
| 3. Homosexual marriage should be made legal. | 2.35 | 1.15 |
| 4. Homosexuals should be locked up and not released until cured. | 1.72 | 1.04 |
| 5. I would be upset if I were a parent and I found that my son or daughter was a homosexual. | 4.01 | 1.04 |
| 6. Homosexuality should be a criminal offense. | 1.89 | 0.98 |
| 7. Homosexuality is a sin. | 2.86 | 1.41 |
| 8. The number of children seduced by homosexuals is greatly exaggerated. | 3.27 | 1.00 |
| 9. Homosexuality is unnatural. | 3.38 | 1.16 |
| 10. The thought of homosexuality "makes me sick." | 2.82 | 1.19 |
| 11. Homosexuals are sick. | 2.64 | 1.11 |
| 12. If homosexuality is allowed to increase it will destroy our society. | 2.66 | 1.11 |
| 13. Other than their sex lives, there is little difference between homosexuals and everybody else. | 3.61 | 1.01 |
| 14. Homosexuality tends to make an individual's whole personality bad. | 2.04 | 0.85 |
| 15. I find it hard to believe that homosexuals can really love each other. | 2.36 | 0.99 |
| 16. It would be a mistake to ever have homosexuals for bosses and leaders over other people. | 2.24 | 0.99 |

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 17. Homosexual males are generally more feminine than other males. | 3.16 | 1.06 |
| 18. A homosexual relationship could be a rewarding as a male-female relationship. | 2.81 | 1.10 |
| 19. Homosexuals should never be allowed to teach school or supervise children. | 2.48 | 1.14 |
| 20. I can hardly imagine myself having a close friendship with a homosexual. | 2.63 | 1.23 |
| 21. Because of its unusual nature, sex between homosexuals can only be animal-like pleasure. | 2.46 | 0.91 |
| 22. I would not want homosexuals to live near me. | 2.54 | 1.06 |
| 23. Homosexuality is just a different kind of life style and, therefore, should not be condemned. | 3.21 | 1.08 |
| 24. Homosexuals are very unhappy people who wish they could be like everybody else. | 2.52 | 0.88 |
| 25. Homosexuals simply can't be trusted. | 1.90 | 0.82 |
| 26. There may be a few exceptions, but most homosexuals are pretty much alike. | 2.18 | 0.84 |
| 27. Homosexuality is not normal and should be done away with for the good of society. | 2.55 | 1.04 |
| 28. I can't see what homosexuals are complaining about; if they would just leave everyone else alone there would not be any problem. | 2.48 | 0.88 |
| 29. Homosexual females are generally more masculine than other females. | 2.92 | 0.95 |
| 30. If homosexuality is accepted by society it will cause more people to become homosexuals. | 2.60 | 1.03 |

TABLE 2

Means and Standard Deviations for
Individual Items Composing the
Index of Homophobia Scale

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

| Item | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| 1. I would feel comfortable working closely with a male homosexual. | 2.59 | 1.09 |
| 2. I would enjoy attending social functions at which homosexuals were present. | 3.01 | 1.07 |
| 3. I would feel uncomfortable if I learned that my neighbor was homosexual. | 3.41 | 1.07 |
| 4. If a member of my sex made a sexual advance toward me, I would feel angry. | 2.37 | 1.15 |
| 5. I would feel comfortable knowing that I was attractive to members of my sex. | 3.61 | 1.12 |
| 6. I would feel uncomfortable being seen in a gay bar. | 2.14 | 1.20 |
| 7. I would feel comfortable if a member of my sex made an advance toward me. | 4.07 | 1.12 |
| 8. I would be comfortable if I found myself attracted to a member of my sex. | 4.12 | 1.08 |
| 9. I would feel disappointed if I learned that my child was a homosexual. | 1.80 | 0.97 |
| 10. I would feel nervous being in a group of homosexuals. | 2.75 | 1.24 |
| 11. I would feel comfortable knowing that my clergyman was homosexual. | 3.87 | 1.06 |
| 12. I would feel I had failed as a parent if I learned that my child was gay. | 3.09 | 1.22 |
| 13. I would feel uncomfortable if I learned that my brother or sister was attracted to members of the same sex. | 2.40 | 1.13 |
| 14. If I saw two men holding hands in public, I would feel disgusted. | 2.63 | 1.03 |
| 15. If a member of my sex made an advance toward me I would be offended. | 2.21 | 1.06 |

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 16. I would feel comfortable if I learned that my teacher was a lesbian. | 3.37 | 1.04 |
| 17. I would feel comfortable if I learned that my brother was attracted to members of his sex. | 3.78 | 0.97 |
| 18. I would feel at ease talking with a homosexual person at a party. | 2.37 | 0.89 |
| 19. I would feel uncomfortable if I learned that my boss was homosexual | 3.01 | 1.05 |
| 20. It would not bother me to walk through a predominantly gay section of town. | 3.23 | 1.14 |
| 21. It would disturb me to find out that my doctor was homosexual. | 2.58 | 1.20 |
| 22. I would feel comfortable if I learned that my best friend of my same sex was homosexual. | 3.26 | 1.21 |
| 23. If a member of my sex made an advance toward me I would feel flattered. | 4.11 | 0.87 |
| 24. I would feel uncomfortable knowing that my son's teacher was a male homosexual. | 2.52 | 1.19 |
| 25. I would feel comfortable working closely with a female homosexual. | 2.97 | 1.10 |

TABLE 3

Frequency Distributions for
IHP and MATH Items Generating
Most Extreme Responses

| Item # | S.Disagree | | Disagree | | Neither | | Agree | | S. Agree | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N |
| MATH | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | 54.9 | 78 | 29.6 | 42 | 9.2 | 13 | 1.4 | 2 | 4.9 | 7 |
| 6 | 41.8 | 59 | 35.5 | 50 | 17.0 | 24 | 2.8 | 4 | 2.8 | 4 |
| 5 | 5.0 | 7 | 7.1 | 10 | 4.3 | 6 | 49.6 | 70 | 34.0 | 48 |
| 25 | 33.6 | 47 | 47.1 | 66 | 15.7 | 22 | 2.9 | 4 | .7 | 1 |
| 14 | 25.0 | 35 | 53.6 | 75 | 16.4 | 23 | 2.9 | 4 | 2.1 | 3 |
| 2 | 29.1 | 41 | 44.7 | 63 | 19.7 | 28 | 4.3 | 6 | 2.1 | 3 |
| 26 | 20.1 | 28 | 48.2 | 67 | 25.9 | 36 | 5.0 | 7 | .7 | 1 |
| 16 | 22.9 | 32 | 44.3 | 62 | 22.1 | 31 | 7.9 | 11 | 2.9 | 4 |
| 13 | 1.4 | 2 | 17.1 | 24 | 17.9 | 25 | 45.7 | 64 | 17.9 | 25 |
| 15 | 17.9 | 25 | 45.0 | 63 | 22.1 | 31 | 12.9 | 18 | 2.1 | 3 |
| 3 | 28.4 | 40 | 27.7 | 39 | 29.8 | 42 | 8.5 | 12 | 5.7 | 8 |
| IH | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | 3.6 | 5 | 3.6 | 5 | 5.8 | 8 | 42.8 | 59 | 44.2 | 61 |
| 8 | 44.2 | 61 | 38.4 | 53 | 8.7 | 12 | 2.9 | 4 | 5.8 | 8 |
| 7 | 44.9 | 62 | 33.3 | 46 | 10.9 | 15 | 5.8 | 8 | 5.1 | 7 |
| 23 | 35.3 | 49 | 46.8 | 65 | 13.7 | 19 | 2.2 | 3 | 2.2 | 3 |
| 6 | 5.8 | 8 | 13.1 | 18 | 5.1 | 7 | 40.9 | 56 | 35.0 | 48 |
| 11 | 33.6 | 46 | 32.8 | 45 | 23.4 | 32 | 7.3 | 10 | 2.9 | 4 |
| 17 | 21.0 | 29 | 50.0 | 69 | 17.4 | 24 | 8.7 | 12 | 2.9 | 4 |
| 13 | 5.1 | 7 | 15.2 | 21 | 15.9 | 22 | 43.5 | 60 | 20.3 | 28 |
| 4 | 2.9 | 4 | 18.1 | 25 | 19.6 | 27 | 31.9 | 44 | 27.5 | 38 |
| 5 | 23.2 | 32 | 37.0 | 51 | 22.5 | 31 | 12.3 | 17 | 5.1 | 7 |
| 18 | 1.4 | 2 | 10.1 | 14 | 25.9 | 36 | 48.9 | 68 | 13.7 | 19 |
| 15 | 18.6 | 31 | 10.2 | 17 | 15.6 | 26 | 31.7 | 53 | 24.0 | 40 |

TABLE 4

Frequency Distributions for
IHP and MATH Items Generating
Ambivalent Responses

| Item # | S.Disagree | | Disagree | | Neither | | Agree | | S. Agree | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N |
| MATH | | | | | | | | | | |
| 21 | 17.3 | 24 | 29.5 | 41 | 44.6 | 62 | 7.2 | 10 | 1.4 | 2 |
| 8 | 3.6 | 5 | 16.5 | 23 | 41.0 | 57 | 26.6 | 37 | 12.2 | 17 |
| 28 | 13.6 | 19 | 36.4 | 51 | 39.3 | 55 | 10.0 | 14 | .7 | 1 |
| 24 | 10.1 | 14 | 41.0 | 57 | 38.8 | 54 | 7.2 | 10 | 2.9 | 4 |
| 27 | 19.6 | 27 | 25.4 | 35 | 37.3 | 52 | 15.2 | 21 | 2.2 | 3 |
| 18 | 13.7 | 19 | 23.7 | 33 | 36.7 | 51 | 19.4 | 27 | 6.5 | 9 |
| 1 | 14.3 | 20 | 27.1 | 38 | 35.0 | 49 | 16.4 | 23 | 7.1 | 10 |
| IH | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | 7.2 | 10 | 25.4 | 35 | 38.4 | 53 | 18.8 | 26 | 10.1 | 14 |

important positions) and psychological characteristics (e.g., homosexuality not negatively affecting one's personality). Negative feelings toward homosexuals, however, were most apparent in personal encounters (e.g., sexual advances), situations in which the respondent's sexual identity would be questioned (e.g., feeling comfortable being attracted to a member of the same sex), and associations with close family members (e.g., feeling comfortable if one's sibling was gay). The frequency distributions for those items which most clearly elicit a strong attitude or feeling from guidance counselors are summarized, in rank order, in table 3.

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INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

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A second interesting finding, summarized in table 4, results from an examination of those items in which at least one-third of the respondents were undecided. While guidance counselors indicated ambivalent attitudes to nearly one-quarter (7) of the items on the MATH, only one item (#2) elicited a non-commital response from a third or more of this sample. These respondents were most uncertain about the nature of sexual pleasure between members of the same sex, the degree of exaggeration about children seduced by homosexuals, that homosexuals bring problems upon themselves and really wished that they could be like everyone else. A plurality of guidance counselors were also uncertain if they would enjoy a social function in which homosexuals were present.

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INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

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Clearly, counselors have stronger feelings toward homosexuality and more pronounced reactions to homosexual situations than they have articulate attitudes about homosexuality. Not only are guidance counselors

TABLE 5

Comparison of Counselor IH and MATH
Adjusted Scores with Other Groups

| | IH | ATH | N | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| COUNSELORS | 60.5 | 53.0 | 141 | |
| N.C. Teachers | ---- | 42.3 | 255 | Fischer, 1982 |
| Ohio HS Stds | ---- | 59.9 | 278 | Price, 1982 |
| College Stds (HI) | 53.0 | ---- | 300 | Hudson & Ricketts, 1980 |
| (OH) | ---- | 55.5 | 131 | Goldberg, 1982 |
| (SC) | 65.8 | 56.7 | 118 | Sears, 1988a |

feelings more negative than their attitudes but these negative feelings are more firmly rooted. Counselor work in administrative areas (tau r = .16, Z = 2.57, $p < .005$) or in the testing and evaluation of students (tau r = .19, Z = 2.95, $p < .001$) also correlated with more negative feelings toward homosexuals. Those counselors who spent a greater proportion of their time testing and evaluating students also expressed more negative attitudes about homosexuality (tau r = .28, Z = 4.28, $p < .001$). Conversely, there was a low negative correlation (tau r = -11, Z = 1.75, $p < .05$) between greater expenditure of time counseling students and expressed negative attitudes about homosexuality.

II. Comparison of counselors' attitudes and feelings vis-a-vis students and teachers.

Further analyses of the score distributions on each of the 25-item IH and the 30-item MATH via factor analysis revealed that each of these scales is uni-dimensional (eigen values = 12.78 and 12.75, respectively). Summative counselor scores were then computed for both the MATH and the IH. These adjusted scores could range from 0 (most positive) to 100 (most negative). These scores are summarized and compared to other population groups in table 5.

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INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

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School counselors express less negative attitudes than high school or college students but more negative attitudes than their fellow Southern teachers. Feelings about homosexuality were also less negative than Southern college students preparing to teach but more negative than students attending schools colleges outside of the deep South.

The relatively negative feelings expressed by guidance counselors in the South vis-a-vis persons residing in other regions in the United States is better evidenced by dividing IH scores into quartiles. According to Hudson & Ricketts (1980:360), scores of less than 25 on this scale evidence "high grade non-homophobics" and those who score between 25 and 50 are labelled "low grade non-homophobics." Persons who scores lie between 50 and 75 are regarded as "low grade homophobics," and "high grade homophobics" score above 75. Table 6 reveals the distribution among various populations which have been studied.

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INSERT TABLE 6 HERE

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As a group, Southern guidance counselors comprised a slightly higher percentage of low grade non-homophobics than undergraduates preparing to teach in the South (28% vs. 21%). However, when compared to college students majoring in other fields and attending institutions of higher education outside of the deep South, this sample of guidance counselors compared less favorably.

III. Relationship of counselors' attitudes and feelings to demographic and professional factors.

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INSERT TABLE 7 HERE

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The relative effects of seven factors on MATH and IH scores are indicated by the Beta weights appearing in table 7. Two conclusions are warranted from an examination of these data. First, almost none of the categoric-demographic variables exerts any significant influence on counselors' attitudes or feelings about homosexuality. Second, the only variable having a consistent and moderate effect on both of these factors

TABLE 6

Percentage Distributions of
IH Scores
Among Various Groups

| | <25 | 26-50 | 51-75 | >75 | N | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| COUNSELORS | 1.4 | 26.6 | 49.6 | 22.4 | 141 | |
| College Students (HI) | 3.8 | 33.5 | 55.5 | 7.2 | 300 | Hudson & Ricketts (1980) |
| (SC) | 0.9 | 19.8 | 44.8 | 34.5 | 118 | Sears (1988a) |

TABLE 7

Step-wise multiple regression (Betas) of Categoric Demographic Variables onto IH and MATH Scores

| | IH | ATH |
|---|---|---|
| Age | .15 | .15 |
| Gender | .19* | .11 |
| Race | -.01 | .16* |
| Education | -.28* | -.30* |
| Experience | -.01 | -.13 |
| Childhood Background | .03 | -.04 |
| School Site | .02 | .04 |

* Regression coefficient greater than twice its standard error

is the level of education of the respondent. Even this variable's effect, though, is limited, since in no case does it account for more than seven percent of the variance in these measures. The gender and race of the respondent modestly contribute, respectively, to the variance of scores on feelings and attitudes toward homosexuality. The marginal effect which these demographic variables have on counselors' attitudes and feelings about homosexuality suggest the existence of other, more powerful factors not included in this regression analysis.

Further data analyses explored the modest relationships of gender, race, and education on counselors' attitudes and feelings about homosexuality. Parametric t-tests were used to determine the nature of these differences. These data are summarized in table 8.

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INSERT TABLE 8 HERE

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Attitudes toward homosexuality vary significantly according to a counselor's gender, race, and educational background. Specifically, counselors who are males, white or who have earned a degree beyond the masters have more positive attitudes toward homosexuality. With respect to counselors' feelings about homosexuals or reactions to homosexual situations, gender and education were discriminating demographic variables. Again, males are likely to harbor more positive feelings in this area as were those who had extensive graduate education.

In addition to examining the relationship between aggregate scores and these demographic variables, multiple regression was used to determine what items on each of these scales contributed the greatest variance to these three demographic factors. Table 9 reveals the results.

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INSERT TABLE 9 HERE

TABLE 8

Means & Standard Deviations of the
IH and MATH Scores According to
Counselor's Gender and Race

| Demographic | IH M | IH SD | t | df | MATH M | MATH SD | t | df |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 54.3* | 21.2 | -2.27 | 137 | 73.0* | 22.2 | -1.57 | 139 |
| Female | 62.3 | 15.8 | | | 79.4 | 18.9 | | |
| Race | | | | | | | | |
| White | 60.5 | 18.3 | -0.11 | 137 | 76.3* | 20.3 | -1.84 | 139 |
| Black | 60.8 | 14.3 | | | 83.4 | 17.3 | | |
| Education | | | | | | | | |
| B.S./M.S. | 62.7* | 16.0 | 2.56 | 137 | 81.3* | 18.5 | 3.44 | 139 |
| Spec/Ph.D. | 54.2 | 19.7 | | | 68.6 | 20.6 | | |

* $p < .001$

TABLE 9

Most Discriminating Items
on the MATH and IH
According to Gender,
Race and Education

| Scale | Item # | Beta | Group 1 X | Group 2 X |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| IH | | | | |
| Gender | | | Male (30) | Female (112) |
| | 19* | -.52 | 3.27 | 2.83 |
| | 20 | .22 | 2.70 | 3.29 |
| | 25 | .42 | 2.40 | 3.04 |
| Education | | | BS/MS (103) | MS+ (35) |
| | 24* | -.29 | 3.67 | 2.94 |
| MATH | | | | |
| Race | | | White (106) | Black (36) |
| | 2 | -.23 | 2.02 | 2.11 |
| | 4 | .35 | 1.55 | 2.19 |
| | 7 | .15 | 2.72 | 3.19 |
| Education | | | BS/MS (106) | MS+ (36) |
| | 7 | -.16 | 3.07 | 2.25 |
| | 12 | .17 | 2.74 | 2.44 |
| | 15 | -.25 | 2.56 | 1.78 |
| | 24 | -.19 | 2.61 | 2.23 |

* Reverse-coded items (5 = Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, etc.)

Using multiple regression in which gender served as the dependent variable and the 25 items on the IH scale were predictive variables revealed that this scale accounted for 36 percent of the total variance of gender; three of these items comprised 22 percent of the total variance. When education served as the dependent variable and the predictive variables were items on the IH, the scale accounted for 26 percent of the total variance of educational level with one item accounting for one-third of this total variance.

Using multiple regression in which race served as the dependent variable and the 30 items on the MATH were predictive variables revealed that this scale accounted for 22 percent of the total variance of race; three items accounted for one-half of this total variance. When education served as the dependent variable with the same set of predictive variables, MATH accounted for 30 percent of the variance with four items comprising 16 percent of this variance.

The items which most clearly discriminated between males and females on the MATH or IH, and between blacks and whites on the MATH are also indicated in table 9. Counselors' feelings about being in close proximity to homosexual persons (in the workplace or in the community) most clearly differentiated males from females. Males in this sample expressed a less negative reaction than their female counterparts. Those counselors who earned a degree beyond the masters also express greater comfort in knowing their son's teacher was gay. Religious and civil rights attitudes vis-a-vis homosexuality were the best discriminators between white and black counselors. Whites were more willing for gay and lesbians to hold important positions, more likely to object to the detention and "curing" of

homosexuals, and more certain that homosexuality was not sinful. Those counselors who had a masters or bachelors degree were also more likely to view homosexuality as a sin, to believe that it might destroy society, to view gay men and lesbians as very unhappy people, and to find it difficult to believe that homosexual persons could really love each other.

IV. Contact school counselors have with homosexual students

Three fourths of the counselors in this sample have suspected a student with whom they worked of having a homosexual orientation; more than half (58%) knew a student who had a homosexual orientation. Counselors working with high school juniors and seniors were significantly ($x2 = 4.52$, $df = 1$, $C = .18$, $\phi = .03$, $p < .05$) more likely to know such students than those working with middle-school children, junior high school students, or high school underclassmen. Counselors working at the junior high level were most likely to report that no students in their school had a homosexual orientation ($x2 = 5.65$, $df = 1$, $C = .20$, $\phi = .04$, $p < .025$).

A plurality (41%) of this sample have counseled a student about his/her homosexual orientation and one-quarter have provided information to a student about homosexuality. Again, counselors working with high school upperclassmen were more likely to have provided counseling ($x2 = 4.89$, $df = 1$, $C = .18$, $\phi$ .03, $p < .05$) and to give information ($x2 = 5.42$, $df = 1$, $C = .19$, $\phi = .04$, $p < .02$).

Fewer counselors have worked with teachers or parents on this issue. Slightly more than one out of eight (13%) counselors have provided materials to teachers at their school about homosexuality. Counselors who have counseled gay students ($x2 = 21.29$, $df = 1$, $C = .39$, $\phi = .18$, $p < .001$)) or who have provided them information about homosexuality ($x2 =$

30.97, df = 1, C = .42, $\phi$ = .22, $p < .001$) were more likely to have provided these materials to teachers. One out of eight counselors (13%) have also spoken with parents about their child's homosexual orientation. Counselors to high school juniors and seniors were more likely ($p < .05$) to have engaged in the latter activity.

Relationship exists between the likelihood of counselors engaging in many of these activities vis-a-vis their attitudes toward homosexuality and their reactions to homosexuals. Using t-tests, analyses of these data revealed that those counselors who knew a homosexual student (know $\overline{X}$ = 59.1, SD = 17.7; not know $\overline{X}$ = 64.6, SD = 16.1; t= 1.6, df = 110, $p < .001$), who counseled a student about his/her homosexual feelings (counsel $\overline{X}$ = 57.6, SD = 17.6; not counsel $\overline{X}$ = 64.7, SD = 16; t = 2.2, df = 105, $p < .001$), who provided information to students about homosexuality (provide $\overline{X}$ = 57.4; SD = 19.8; not provide $\overline{X}$ = 63.8, SD = 14.9; t = 1.8, df = 101, $p < .001$), or who have participated in programs to expand their understanding (participate $\overline{X}$ = 51.2, SD = 19.7; not participate $\overline{X}$ = 61.7, SD = 15.8; t = 2.8, df = 105, $p < .001$) have significantly less negative feelings about being near homosexuals, as measured on the IH scale, than those who had not engaged in these activities.

Further, those counselors who suspected a student of having a homosexual orientation (suspect $\overline{X}$ = 76.7, SD = 20.6; not suspect $\overline{X}$ = 83.1, SD = 15.4; t = 1.3, df = 127, $p < .001$), who knew a homosexual student (know $\overline{X}$ = 76.0, SD = 20.4; not know $\overline{X}$ = 82.5, SD 18.5; t = 1.6, df = 112, $p < .001$), who counseled a student about his/her homosexual feelings (counsel $\overline{X}$ = 73.5, SD = 19.6; not counsel $\overline{X}$ = 81.7, SD = 19.4; t = 2.2, df = 107, $p < .001$), who provided information to students about homosexuality (provide $\overline{X}$ = 73.4, SD = 21.4; not provide $\overline{X}$ = 81, SD = 18.1; t = 1.9, df = 103, $p < .001$), or who participated in programs to expand their understanding

(participate $\overline{X}$ = 68.9, SD = 22; not participate $\overline{X}$ = 77.9, SD = 18.5; t = 2.1, df = 107, $p < .001$) have significantly less negative attitudes about homosexuality, as measured on the ATH survey, than did those who did not.

V. School counselors views of their professional role in working with homosexual students

As discussed elsewhere, compared to high school students or college students preparing to teach, this sample of guidance counselors expressed less negative attitudes and feelings about homosexuality. However, in both absolute terms and in comparison to Southern teachers, their attitudes and feelings were generally negative.

Precisely what role do school counselors assume when working with a gay or lesbian student? What professional responsibilities do counselors believe that they have in dealing with homosexuality? Table 10 summarizes counselors perceived roles and responsibilities, noting those items which correlate with either their attitudes or feelings about homosexuality.

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Insert Table 10 Here

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Despite the personal misgivings which many of these counselors had expressed about homosexuality, most assumed a non-judgmental and often supportive role when dealing with homosexual students. The vast majority (90%+) believed that sexual concerns of students are legitimate topics for discussion. Only a small proportion of this sample would expect these students to overcome their feelings. Three out of four school counselors would help these students to accept their sexual orientation, and 60 percent believed that counselors should work in school to lessen prejudicial attitudes about homosexuality. This sample, however, was

TABLE 10

Distribution of Counselor Responses for Assumed Professional Roles and Their Relationship to IH/ATH Scores

| Role | Likert Responses SA | A | D | SD | Mean X | Rho coef. ATH | IH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A) focus on students' feelings in order to clarify and understand | 55.0 | 42.9 | .7 | 1.4 | 1.5 | NS | NS |
| B) overcome students' homosexual feelings | 1.5 | 13.6 | 55.3 | 29.6 | 3.1 | -.39 | -.30 |
| C) accept students' sexual orientation | 21.4 | 57.3 | 18.3 | 3.1 | 2.0 | NS | NS |
| D) lessen homophobic attitudes in school | 15.6 | 55.5 | 24.2 | 4.7 | 2.2 | -.18 | -.16 |
| E) inform parents about child's homosexuality | 9.2 | 35.4 | 39.2 | 16.2 | 2.6 | .23 | .21 |

nearly split regarding the desirability of informing a child's parents about his or her homosexuality.

The relationships between these professional roles and counselors attitudes toward homosexuality (ATH) and feelings about homosexuals (IH) were also examined. As indicated in Table 10, moderate correlations, using the Spearman Rho, were found between these standardized measures and three of the five counseling roles. Those counselors who perceived their role as assisting students in overcoming their homosexual feelings evidenced significantly more negative attitudes (overcome $\overline{X}$ = 93.3, SD = 11.2; not overcome $\overline{X}$ = 73.9, SD = 20.6; t = 4.1, df = 130, $p < .001$) and more negative feelings (overcome $\overline{X}$ = 66.8, SD = 19; not overcome $\overline{X}$ = 57.3, SD = 19.3; t = 2, df = 130, $p < .001$) than those who did not assume this role. Also, counselors who assumed the responsibility of informing parents about their child's sexual orientation also harbored more negative attitudes (inform $\overline{X}$ = 81.2, SD = 17.8; not inform $\overline{X}$ = 74.3, SD = 22.5; t = 1.6, df = 128, $p < .001$) and negative feelings (inform $\overline{X}$ =61.8, SD = 17.4; not inform $\overline{X}$ = 57.2, SD = 21.2; t = 1.3, df = 128, $p < .001$) than those who would not inform a homosexual child's parents. Finally, those respondents who believed that counselors should work in their schools to lessen homophobic attitudes expressed significantly less negative attitudes (work $\overline{X}$ = 72.4, SD = 21.2; not work $\overline{X}$ = 86.7, SD = 15.1; t = -3.8, df = 126, $p < .001$) and less negative feelings (work $\overline{X}$ = 54.7, SD = 17.8; not work $\overline{X}$ = 66.7, SD = 21.1; t = -3.3, df = 126, $p < .001$) than those who did not believe counselors should not assume this role.

Prior analysis of counselors scores on the IH scale, revealed that about one-quarter of this sample could be classified as low grade non-homophobics (scores of 50 or less on the IH scale); about 50 percent of the sample were low grade homophobics (scores between 51 and

76); and, another one-quarter were high grade homophobics (scores above 75). Based upon these categories, counselor responses on roles which moderately correlated with the IH scores were analyzed. Those who were categorized as low grade non-homophobics were three times more likely to believe that counselors should lessen prejudicial attitudes in the schools, two and one-half times more likely to not believe that parents should be informed about their child's sexual orientation, and six times more likely to disagree that a counselor should help students overcome their homosexual feelings.

Multiple t-tests were also performed to ascertain the relationships, if any, between these beliefs and several demographic variables. Given the data analyzed earlier, it was hypothesized that more supportive roles would be evidenced among counselors who work with older students, have more experience in the field, and possess more formal education. Additionally, differences were expected in responses relating to the race and gender of the counselor.

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Insert Table 11 Here

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The relationships among these demographic variables and counselors' assumed roles are listed in Table 11. Several of these hypotheses were supported. For example, counselors working with junior high students were <u>less</u> strongly supportive of assuming a clarification role with a homosexual student (junior high $\overline{X}$ = 1.7, SD .76; high school $\overline{X}$ = 1.4, SD .49; t= -2.4, df = 138, $p < .001$) than those working with high school clients. Also, counselors who had ten years or less experience (10 years or less $\overline{X}$ = 1.5, SD .64; 10 years or more $\overline{X}$ = 1.4, SD .49; t= 1.1, df = 138, $p < .05$) were also less reluctant to adopt this counseling role

TABLE 11

Summary of t-values for Hypothesized Relationships Between Demographic/Categoric Variables and Counselor Roles

| Variable | Role A | B | C | D | E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experience | -2.9 | 1.1 | -1.2 | NS | 2.0 |
| Race | 2.7 | NS | 3.1 | NS | NS |
| Gender | NS | NS | -1.6 | NS | -1.5 |
| Grade Level | -2.9 | -2.4 | NS | -1.1* | NS |
| Education | NS | NS | -2.1 | NS | 1.7 |

* inverse than hypothesized relationship

vis-a-vis those with more experience. Counselors working with high school clients were more likely than those working at the lower grades not to inform parents of their child's homosexual orientation (high school $\bar{X}$ = 2.8, SD .87; junior high $\bar{X}$ = 2.3, SD .77; t= -2.9, df = 128, $p < .001$). This was also true for white counselors (white $\bar{X}$ = 2.5, SD 1.1; black $\bar{X}$ = 2.0, SD 1.1; t = 2.7, df = 140, $p < .001$) and those with greater counseling experience (10 years or more $\bar{X}$ = 2.5, SD = .62; 10 years or more $\bar{X}$ = 2.9, SD = .82; t= -2.9, df = 128, $p < .001$). Counselors with less formal education (BS/MS $\bar{X}$ = 3.1, SD = .71; SP/PhD $\bar{X}$ = 3.3, SD = .59; t= -2.1, df = 130, $p < .001$) and with less counseling experience (10 years or more $\bar{X}$ = 3.1, SD = .71; 10 years or more $\bar{X}$ = 3.2, SD = .65; t= -1.2, df = 130, $p < .01$) were also more likely to try to help a student overcome his/her homosexual feelings. Black counselors were also more likely to assume this role (black $\bar{X}$ = 2.4, SD 1.3; white $\bar{X}$ = 3.1, SD = .90; t= 3.08, df = 140, $p < .001$). Finally, respondents who were more likely to underscore the importance of counselors to lessen prejudicial attitudes about homosexuality in the school tended to be male (male $\bar{X}$ = 1.7, SD = .87; female $\bar{X}$ = 2.0, SD = .98; t= -1.5, df = 140, $p < .001$).

VI. Unique difficulties confronting homosexual students

Counselors who knew or counseled gay and lesbian students were asked about difficulties these children confront within their school. Table 12 summarizes these findings.

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Insert Table 12 Here

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As indicated in Table 12, homosexual students experience greater difficulties than their heterosexual peers in four major problem areas:

TABLE 12
Counselor's Estimate of Frequency
of Unique Problems Confronting
Homosexual Students with Whom
They Have Worked

| Item | All/Most | Some | Few/None | DK |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Internalization Problems | | | | |
| a - greater personal difficulties than their heterosexual classmates | 58.3 | 23.1 | 5.5 | 13.2 |
| b - more comfortable with their sexual orientation | 2.2 | 8.9 | 66.6 | 22.2 |
| c - internalized negative attitudes about "being gay" | 33.3 | 26.7 | 16.6 | 23.2 |
| d - lower self-esteem | 30.0 | 27.8 | 21.1 | 21.1 |
| School Culture Problems | | | | |
| a - fearful of being harassed in school if they "come out" | 73.7 | 9.9 | 4.4 | 12.1 |
| b - feel more isolated from their peers | 64.4 | 14.4 | 6.6 | 14.4 |
| c - more likely to experience harrassment | 70.8 | 7.9 | 7.7 | 13.5 |
| d - more likely to deny their sexual orientation | 58.9 | 13.3 | 14.4 | 13.3 |
| e - more likely to "hide behind" school activities | 16.7 | 24.4 | 30.0 | 28.9 |
| Symptomatic Behavioral Problems | | | | |
| a - use drugs/alcohol to deal with their sexual orientation | 15.5 | 35.6 | 17.8 | 31.1 |
| b - more likely to display suicidal tendencies than other students | 11.1 | 36.7 | 23.3 | 28.9 |
| c - fewer academic difficulties | 4.4 | 20.0 | 44.5 | 31.1 |
| d - more likely to display eating disorders (e.g., anorexia, bulimia) | 3.3 | 14.4 | 27.8 | 54.4 |
| Gender Role Problems | | | | |
| a - girls with masculine characteristics are treated no differently in school by their peers than those who appear more feminine | 22.5 | 21.4 | 46.1 | 10.1 |
| b - homosexual male students have a more difficult time in school than homosexual female students | 44.4 | 12.5 | 9.1 | 34.1 |
| c - effeminate boys are more likely to be harassed by peers in school than those with more masculine qualities | 77.7 | 12.2 | 1.1 | 8.9 |

internalization; school culture; symptomatic behavior, and gender role.

Only a few counselors reported that homosexual students with whom they worked do not experience greater personal difficulties or are more comfortable with their sexual orientation than their heterosexual counterparts. One in three counselors reported all or most of these homosexual students have internalized negative attitudes about being gay and evidenced lower self-esteem.

Gay students experience problems within school. For example, eight out of ten counselors observed that most homosexual students in their schools are fearful of harassment, feel isolated from their peers, and often experience harassment. The problems confronting the gay student in the school may partly be attributed to the lack of adequate knowledge most students -- gay and straight -- have regarding homosexuality and the common association of homosexuality with AIDS. Two-thirds of these counselors observed that all or most students in their school display negative attitudes about homosexuality. Moreover, less than one in ten counselors reported that students in their school are knowledgeable about AIDS and only one counselor in a hundred believed that their school provides adequate and accurate information about homosexuality.

About one-half these school counselors reported that a significant number of gay students display behavioral symptoms which are likely rooted in the inability to deal with their sexual orientation. The most common coping mechanisms for these adolescents are using drugs/alcohol and displaying suicidal tendencies. Few counselors observed -- though many simply did not know -- these students experiencing fewer academic problems in school or displaying eating disorders.

Failing to conform to gender role expectations is a stereotypical image of gay men and lesbians. While many, in fact, blend into the

heterosexual world, some do not. The difficulty which homosexual students experience in school is sometimes magnified by their inability or unwillingness to conform to specific gender role behavior. Though counselors reported that this difficulty is experienced by both sexes, they observed male students who display effeminate behaviors experiencing greater difficulties in school than women with masculine characteristics.

VII. Assessment of adequate preparation of these counselors and their fellow professionals to meet the needs of homosexual students

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Insert Table 13 Here

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As indicated in Table 13, eight out of ten counselors in this sample believe themselves to be knowledgeable about AIDS and nearly two-thirds agree that they are well informed about homosexuality. Black counselors considered themselves less knowledgeable about AIDS and homosexuality, respectively (black $\overline{X}$ = 2.2, SD = .61; white $\overline{X}$ = 1.9, SD = .71; t= -2.6, df = 137, $p < .001$), (black $\overline{X}$ = 2.5, SD = .72; white $\overline{X}$ = 2.2, SD = .67; t= -1.7, df = 136, $p < .001$). This pattern also existed for those who had less formal education (BS/MS $\overline{X}$ = 2.0, SD = .72; SP/PhD $\overline{X}$ = 1.7, SD = .60; t= - 1.9, df = 137, $p < .001$), (BS/MS $\overline{X}$ = 2.4, SD = .62; SP/PhD $\overline{X}$ = 2.1, SD = .82; t= 1.9, df = 136, $p < .001$).

While respondents were evenly divided regarding the knowledge of fellow counselors about homosexuality, only one-third of the sample rated most teachers in their school as knowledgeable. Interestingly, counselors at the junior high school level rated teachers in their schools more knowledgeable than did high school counselors rating their faculty (junior high $\overline{X}$ = 1.9, SD = 1.4; high school $\overline{X}$ = 2.3, SD = 1.3; t= 1.7, df = 137, p

TABLE 13
Distributions and Means of Counselors Evaluation
of Their and Their Colleagues' Knowledge
About AIDS and Homosexuality

| Item | $\bar{X}$ | SA | A | D | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am knowleable about AIDS | 1.9 | 25.2 | 57.6 | 15.1 | 2.2 |
| I am knowledgeable about homosexuality | 2.3 | 9.4 | 55.1 | 31.2 | 3.6 |
| SC counselors are knowledgeable about homosexuality | 2.5 | 5.2 | 47.8 | 41.2 | 5.9 |

< .001). No significant differences, however, existed between these responses and whether the counselor worked at a rural, urban or suburban school.

Perceived support in this controversial area of counseling from teachers and administrators working within the same school was also low. For example, from among those counselors in a position to know, the vast majority (75%+) observed few, if any, of their school's teachers who were supportive of gay and lesbian students, discussed homosexuality in the classroom, or considered it an alternative lifestyle. Further, slightly less than one-third (30%) of the respondents indicated that building level administrators viewed homosexual concerns as legitimate topics for counselors discussion with their school-age clients. Counselors working with high school juniors and seniors were more likely than those working with students at other levels to report their school administration holding this supportive position ($x2 = 4.2$, $df = 1$, $C = .17$, $\phi .03$, $p < .05$) and to report that their school's teachers discuss homosexuality or homosexual related issues in the classroom (high school $\bar{X} = 2.4$, $SD = 2.1$; junior high $\bar{X} = 3.3$, $SD = 2.2$; $t = 1.1$, $df = 136$, $p < .001$). Counselors working at the junior high level, however, report that their fellow teachers as more willing to consider homosexuality an alternative life style (junior high $\bar{X} = 2.2$, $SD = 2.0$; high school $\bar{X}$ 2.9, $SD = 1.8$; $t = 1.9$, $df = 136$, $p < .001$). Finally, counselors working in suburban schools were more likely to report teachers in their school supportive of students who may have a homosexual orientation than counselors working in rural schools (suburban $\bar{X} = 2.2$, $SD = 2.1$; rural $\bar{X} = 2.7$, $SD = 1.9$; $t = 1.2$, $df = 94$; $p < .05$).

Given this homo-negative environment, it was somewhat surprising to learn that 40% of these counselors discuss homosexuality and homosexual-related issues among their counseling staff. Again, counselors

working with high school upper classmen were most likely to report discussing these issues ($x2 = 9.19$, $df = 1$, $C = .25$, $\phi = .07$, $p < .01$).

VIII. Relationships among counselors attitudes/feelings about homosexuality, the professional role they assume in working with gay students, and their participation in workshops about homosexuality

Less than one-fifth of the sample indicated that they have participated in programs to expand their knowledge about homosexuality. Counselors working below the high school level were three to six times less likely to have attended such workshops or to have engaged in any other activities (e.g., reading professional materials) to enhance their professional knowledge about counseling this sexual minority.

Participating in programs to expand their professional knowledge about working with gay students is strongly associated with providing services to sexual minority youth. For example, a powerful relationship exists between attending these workshops and providing materials to teachers ($x2 = 25.48$, $df = 1$, $C = .39$, $\phi = .18$, $p < .001$) or to homosexual students ($x2 = 14.94$, $df = 1$, $C = .31$, $\phi = .11$, $p < .001$) about homosexuality, and to the counseling of gay students ($x2 = 13.4$, $df = 1$, $C = .29$, $\phi = .09$, $p < .001$).

Of course, it is not possible to determine whether this willingness is due to prior participation in such workshops or to confronting this issue with a client at an earlier point in time. However, it is interesting to note that those who have suspected students of having a homosexual orientation expressed a greater willingness to participate in workshops to expand their knowledge about homosexuality ($x2 = 4.1$, $df = 1$, $C = .17$, $\phi = .03$, $p < .05$). Further, those willing to participate in these workshops also expressed less negative attitudes (participate $\bar{X} = 76.1$, $SD = 20.2$; not participate $\bar{X} = 82.2$, $SD = 18.3$; $t = 1.7$, $df = 139$, $p < .001$) and less

negative feelings (participate $\overline{X}$ = 58.1, SD = 17.5; not participate $\overline{X}$ = 65.6, SD = 16.1; t = 2.4, df = 137, $p < .001$) about homosexuality.

A majority (68%) of those surveyed indicated a willingness to attend such workshops. This was the second most commonly cited activity which guidance counselors expressed an interest in participating during the next year. The other activities in which counselors would likely participate during the next twelve months were, in descending order of interest: attending a workshop on AIDS (72%), reading recent materials about sexual orientation (51%), preparing educational materials about homosexuality for interested teachers (40%), assembling a counseling packet for concerned students (32%), meeting with gay and lesbian adults (25%), discussing concerns of the homosexual student at a faculty gathering (17%), and engaging in a dialogue with parents about homosexuality in a school-sponsored program (12%).

Clearly, situations in which the counselor would be more personally involved were less appealing. A variety of factors contribute to the willingness of counselors to engage in these activities. For example, counselors are more willing to discuss concerns of homosexual students within a faculty setting who have known a homosexual student ($x2 = 4.7$, df = 1, C = .18, $\phi = .03$, $p < .05$), who have provided materials to teachers about homosexuality ($x2 = 4.5$, df = 1, C = .18, $\phi = .03$, $p < .05$), and who have attended workshops about counseling gay students ($x2 = 15.6$, df = 1, C = .32, $\phi = .11$). Also, those counselors who are most willing to meet with gay and lesbian adults to learn about this special population also harbored significantly less negative attitudes about homosexuality (meet $\overline{X}$ = 70.6, SD = 21.9; not meet $\overline{X}$ = 80.4, SD = 18.5; t = 2.6, df = 139, $p < .001$) and less negative feelings about homosexuals (meet $\overline{X}$ = 51.7, SD = 17; not meet $\overline{X}$ = 63.4, SD = 16.6; t = 3.5, df = 137, $p < .001$). These respondents were

also most likely to view their counseling roles within the school as lessening prejudicial attitudes about homosexuality in the school (meet $\bar{X}$ = 1.9, SD = .71; not meet $\bar{X}$ = 2.1, SD = .71; t = 2.5, df = 126, $p < .001$) and to accepting their client's sexual orientation (meet $\bar{X}$ = 1.8, SD = .63; not meet $\bar{X}$ = 2.1, SD = .74; t = 1.8, df = 129, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Significant differences were found between counselors' attitudes and feelings about homosexuality vis-a-vis their educational level, gender, and race. Specifically, counselors who are males, white or who have earned a degree beyond the masters have more positive attitudes toward homosexuality. With respect to counselors' feelings about homosexuals or reactions to homosexual situations, gender and education are the discriminating demographic variables. Again, males are likely to harbor more positive feelings in this area as were those who had extensive graduate education.

Counselors often expressed ambivalent attitudes toward homosexuality though few harbored neutral feelings (FN4). Counselors' attitudes toward homosexuality, particularly regarding their civil rights were more favorable than expressed feelings about hypothetical situations in which a family member has a homosexual orientation or wherein the counselor's sexual orientation might be questioned. Thus, as the social distance lessened a greater degree of discomfort was expressed. This finding is consistent with the work of others (Gentry, 1986, Irwin & Thompson, 1977).

Also consistent with studies of other segments of the population (FN5), minorities and those with less education express more negative attitudes or feelings about homosexuality and toward homosexuals. Unlike these studies, males participating in this study were more tolerant than

females. This may be due, in part, to sampling error or to the characteristics of males who work within this particular profession. Demographic variables, such as the age of respondent and the size of community in which the person grew up or worked, also contributed little to explain differences among counselors' attitudes and feelings.

In absolute terms, many counselors expressed alarmingly negative attitudes and feelings. Relative to other professional groups, such as fellow Southern teachers, their negativity is even more disconcerting. Compared with Southern teachers, school counselors expressed more negative attitudes and feelings about homosexuality. What is perhaps most disturbing is the degree of negativism expressed by the very professionals whose principal responsibility is to counsel young people.

Attitudes and feelings, of course, are not static. Several researchers have reported on the positive impact which seminars, employing lectures, guest speakers, films, debate and dialogue, have had on reducing negative attitudes and feelings about homosexuality (FN6). Shifts in persons' attitudes or feelings, of course, do not mean that concomitant changes in behavior will occur. Persons' expressed attitudes and feelings toward a particular group or subject and their exhibited behavior in a specific situation is not necessarily consistent. This relationship between counselors' attitudes and feelings about homosexuality vis-a-vis their work with gay youth was explored in this paper.

While most guidance counselors at all grade levels (5-12) have suspected and known students with a homosexual orientation, most counselors in this sample felt ill-prepared to work with this special population. For example, nearly sixty percent of the sample reported that they have known a student who has had a homosexual orientation. Less than one-quarter, however, have chosen to provide students with information about homosexuality or to participate in programs to expand their knowledge about this sexual minority.

School counselors are not comfortable associating themselves publicly with this issue. They were three times more likely to express a willingness to learn more about homosexuality through workshops and readings than to engage in personal contact with gay/lesbian adults, school faculty, or parents where the issue of homosexuality is to be discussed.

This unwillingness to directly confront this issue may be the result of counselors' inadequate training, biased attitudes, and non-counseling demands on their professional time. Despite these problems, most counselors report they would assume a non-judgmental or even a supportive role in working with the homosexual student. Many, too, opined that counselors have a responsibility to lessen homosexual prejudice within the school setting. Counselors' personal attitudes and feelings discriminated those who were most supportive from those who were least supportive. Most counselors, however, claimed to be able to put aside personal prejudices and assume a professional relationship with these clients.

Among the minority of school counselors who have worked with gay youth, the overwhelming majority report these students experiencing greater social and psychological difficulties than their heterosexual counterparts. Many of these students have internalized negative attitudes about being gay and exhibit lower self-esteem. Within the school setting, most are fearful of harassment and are isolated from their fellow students. A minority of gay youth, these counselors report, exhibit symptomatic behaviors ranging from eating disorders to suicidal behavior.

Those counselors who provide professional services to these students are more likely to report attending workshops on this topic. Two-thirds of this sample, however, would attend a workshop on homosexuality or

participate in a program on counseling homosexual students if it was available.

Training counselors to work effectively with homosexual students should be a high priority for school districts, counseling associations, and university graduate programs. An integrative and on-going set of programs jointly sponsored by these groups may be the most effective. Such workshops ought to include the participation by gay youth.

ENDNOTES

1. Only a few researchers have drawn their samples from the Southeast. These include the work of Fischer (1982), Haynes & Oziel, (1976), and Lance (1987).

2. For example, a variety of studies have examined the attitudes of health professionals (Fort, Steiner, & Conrad, 1971; Garfinkle & Morin, 1978; Morris, 1973; Pauly & Goldstein, 1970), students (Baker, 1980; Dressler, 1979; Glenn & Russell, 1986; Hudson & Ricketts, 1980; Lumby, 1976; Minnigerode, 1976; Page & Yee, 1986; Price, 1982; Sobel, 1976; Storms, 1978; Thompson, & Fishburn, 1977; Yarber & Yee, 1983), and teachers (Fischer, 1982; Fretz, 1975). For a summary of many of these studies consult: Fyfe (1983), Herek (1984), and Morin & Garfinkle (1978).

3. Authors writing articles in journals such as The School Counselor, Counselor Education and Supervision, and Journal of Counseling and Development, include: Chng, 1980; Gumaer, 1987; Haynes; 1977; Jones, 1978; Krysiak, 1987; Nuehring, Fein & Tyler, 1974; Powell, 1987; Schneider & Tremble, 1986; Sears, 1987; Tartagni, 1978.

4. Scholars, like Kenneth Plummer (1981), have criticized the exclusive use of paper-and-pencil instruments to explore homo-negative attitudes and homophobic feelings. The focus in such studies, they argue, is incorrectly placed upon the individual and his or her presumed pathology. I acknowledge this perspective. The social context within which these attitudes and feelings are constructed as well as those structural relations and historical forces which are reflected in them will be discussed in my forthcoming book, Growing up Gay in the South.

5. For example, consult: Baker, 1980; Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Nyberg & Alston, 1977.

6. These studies, most of which involved university students, include: Dearth & Cassell, 1976; Goldberg, 1982; Greenberg, 1975; Taylor, 1982.

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